

December 19th – 4th Sunday in Advent

Centering Breath Prayer: Child of love...make me obedient.

Opening Prayer:

Dear Christ Child, I come before you today in preparation for your approaching re-birth. Each day brings us a little closer as we travel along the journey of love and today I come to seek you and to understand what you would have me do as your follower. I don't like to take orders and it is often difficult for me to be obedient. Teach me your ways and help me to follow them so that your love may be revealed. In is in your loving name that I pray. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 1:22-25

Key Verse: Matthew 1:24: “When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord’s angel had told him to do. Joseph took Mary as his wife” (NCV).

Obey! What a nasty little four letter word! How difficult it is for most of us to obey anyone, even God. No matter how much we love someone, obedience comes hard. Jesus understood this, yet he still gave us some commandments. He knew that we would fail to obey them all, yet he also knew that it was important that we acknowledge his right to command us. We are not what we would like to be and we do not always do the right things. Luckily we have a very forgiving Savior or we would never be saved. If our obedience was the key to salvation, no one would enter into the kingdom of God. We all fall short. That’s what Paul was talking about in Romans 7:14-25 when he talks about doing the things he hates and not doing the things he wants to do. He talks a lot about the law which demands strict obedience but which cannot bring salvation, because we are not capable of fulfilling the law. Jesus was the one who fulfilled the law so that we could be reconciled with our loving God. Forgiveness is stronger than the law, no matter what the commands may be. We are free from the law, but there are still things which Jesus desires for us to do. He desires us to love one another and treat each other with respect. He desires us to care for the needs of one another, brings hope to them in their hours of darkness. He desires for us to share the good news with others so that they, too, might follow and become disciples. How often do we fail to do these things? We have free will to do or not to do. There are often consequences when we fail to obey the desires of our Lord. If it were not for the love and the forgiveness which Jesus exhibited, we would all lose out. Does that mean we should not even try? Silly question! If we do not try, how will we ever succeed? God’s grace and love are sufficient, but when we turn our backs away from what God desires in us we have nothing to hold onto. Obedience may be difficult, but it has great rewards and sometimes disobedience has terrible consequences.

Joseph obeyed the angel. He only heard from God in a dream, but he obeyed anyway. What would have happened if Joseph had not married Mary? Who can say? Jesus would certainly have been born, but the circumstances of the birth would have been different. Prophecies would not have been fulfilled in the same manner. But, God knew his man. God chose someone who would be able to respond in the right way.

When we come to the grand moment of truth, will we be like Joseph and do what the Lord asks of us? This is something each of us will face at some point in our lives. There will come a moment when we will have to stand up and be counted for the Lord or turn our backs and walk away. The only hope we have is that the Lord will still love us and still forgive us when we return to the Lord. Sometimes we make the wrong choices. We run away instead of obeying the command of our Lord. We decide it is too difficult or God didn't really mean that or some such thing, and we say, "No." How patiently God waits for us to return and say, "I'm sorry!" We are then forgiven, though we may still have consequences for our inattention to God. How much simpler to obey in the first place, but then we humans usually don't do things the easy way! God never "makes" us do anything. It would be much simpler if God did so, but then God offers us a free choice every time. I don't like to obey, either. I can be just as stubborn and stiff-necked as the Israelites. But, I love my Lord, and I desire to do what would please Jesus. I don't always succeed, but I will never stop trying. I am ecstatic that God chooses to forgive me when I fail and loves me forever, because I can be very unlovable! I don't like the word "obey" and I'm not good at doing it, but I will continue to follow my loving Lord, the Child of Love so soon to be born anew. And I will bless his Holy name forever, and strive to obey his commandments to love, serve and make disciples along the way. How about you?

Additional Scripture: Romans 7:14-25

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. How obedient am I to the things I know Jesus has commanded?
2. Do I ask forgiveness when I fail?
3. What can I do today that will reflect my desire to obey the Lord?

Suggestions for action:

1. Phrase for your tree: **OBEY THE LORD.**
2. Be very conscious today of the commandments to love, serve and make disciples. Watch how you obey or disobey them throughout the day. See how you can improve each day.
3. List some things you can do to be more obedient in your journey of love.
4. Make a concerted effort to show your love to those with whom you come into contact today.

Closing Prayer:

Dearest Child of Love, today's lesson is a hard one. I don't really want to obey. But, I do love you and want to please you. Help me to find ways to be more loving as I journey through the day. Show me where and how you want me to serve someone today. And lead me in opportunities to make new disciples as I go along the highway of Holiness today. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.